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ABSTRACT

Characteristics and needs of Hunter College students were studied during 1981-1983. The college's use of institutional research to accommodate an increasingly nontraditional student body was also assessed. Attention was directed to: the student population's ethnicity, income, and employment; students' academic experiences; times of day most students attended classes; evening class enrollments; patterns of class attendance for students with different majors; patterns of class attendance for students employed part-time; and the motivational basis for current class scheduling by students. Based on the finding that students were generally uninformed about the availability of support services, steps were taken to remedy the situation, including the establishment of information centers. Institutional service areas identified as critical concerns were counseling, registration, and security. In attempting to understand the college's social environment, consideration was given to needs of different types of students (part- and full-time, returning women students, commuters). Based on study findings, a series of reforms was initiated, such as keeping the administrative offices open longer and evening food services. Guidelines for other urban universities on conducting self-studies are included. (SW)

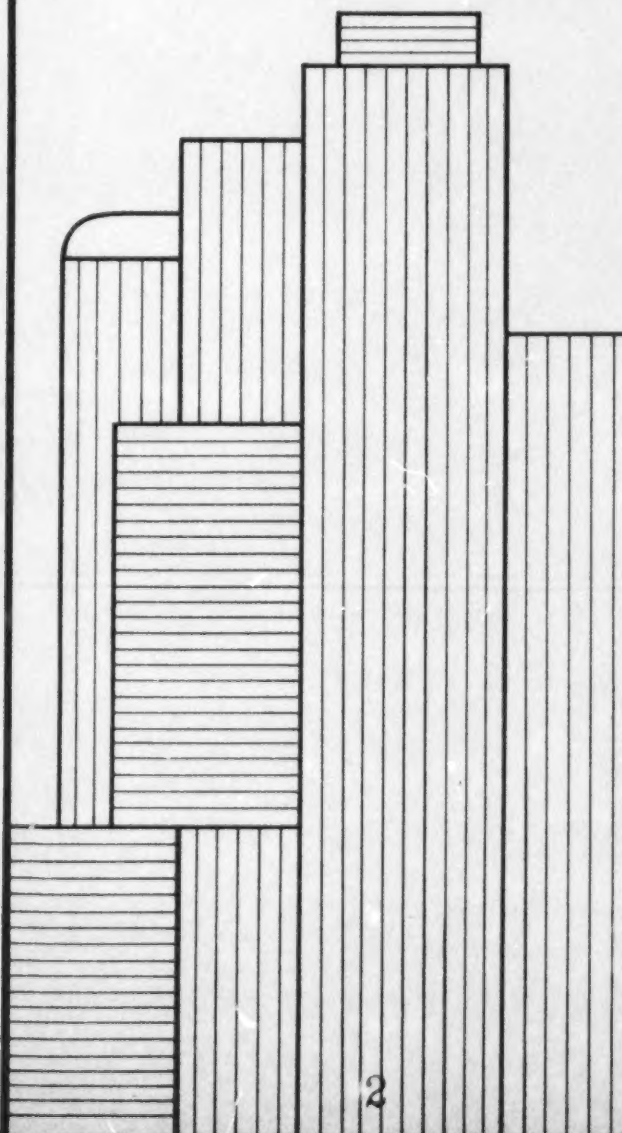
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Today's Urban University Students: Part 2

A Case Study of Hunter College

Evelyn M. Davila, Project Director



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The College Board

**Today's Urban
University Students:
Part 2**

A Case Study of Hunter College

Final Report to the Ford Foundation
on the Urban University Study
by the Washington Office of the College Board

Evelyn M. Davila, Project Director

College Entrance Examination Board, New York, 1985

The College Board is a nonprofit membership organization that provides tests and other educational services for students, schools, and colleges. The membership is composed of more than 2,500 colleges, schools, school systems, and education associations. Representatives of the members serve on the Board of Trustees and advisory councils and committees that consider the programs of the College Board and participate in the determination of its policies and activities.

Additional copies of this report and its companion, *Today's Urban University Students: Part 1. Profile of a New Generation*, are available as a set and may be obtained from College Board Publications, Box 886, New York, New York 10101. The price for the set is \$6.

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Foreword

Many colleges and universities located in urban centers were founded, or have since changed their mission, to serve the previously unmet educational needs of citizens living in the inner city. In the 1980s these institutions enroll a student population that is increasingly varied in age, ethnicity, economic background, and life circumstances.

A grant from the Ford Foundation to the Washington Office of the College Board supported a project to help urban colleges assess the changing needs and characteristics of their students. The project had two parts: (1) A survey of students in ten selected urban institutions across the country. The outcomes of the ten-college study are summarized in a companion report titled *Today's Urban University Students: Part 1. Profile of a New Generation*. (2) A case study of Hunter College and its use of institutional research for accommodating an increasingly nontraditional student body. Although Hunter was not part of the ten-college survey, Hunter conducted its own student survey (with support of a separate grant from the Ford Foundation) between fall 1981 and spring 1983. Its comprehensive findings offer a useful supplement to the broader, national sampling provided by the ten-college study.

This report, *Today's Urban University Students: Part 2. A Case Study of Hunter College*, presents the process and results of the Hunter experience. It is intended to offer ideas and perspectives to other urban institutions about gathering

survey data, interpreting it in the context of previous studies and reports, and using the combined findings to make important decisions about programs, scheduling, and services for students.

Urban college planners and leaders need to be able to answer the question, "Guess Who's Coming to College?," with facts. We hope *Today's Urban University Students*, Parts 1 and 2, promotes sound institutional research and ultimately fosters campus decisions and policies designed to serve students better.

Evelyn M. Davila directed this effort for the College Board. Richard Lacey helped to write the case study, and Shirley Mow, Executive Assistant to the President, Hunter College, contributed the section describing the methodology and findings of the Hunter survey. Charles Holloway provided helpful comments on drafts of the report. Diane Erving typed the manuscript.

Once again, the Ford Foundation has proved an important ally in helping support policy-related research, developed to provide clues and solutions to fundamental social and educational problems in the cities.

Lawrence E. Gladieux
Executive Director
Washington Office of the
College Board

Introduction

Public urban universities are experiencing the truth of the poet Paul Valery's remark, "the future is not what it used to be." Many of them cannot rely on traditional guidelines for planning because their students are increasingly nontraditional. Women entering or returning to the work force, working adults seeking to enhance or change their careers or to enrich their personal lives, and diverse minority students comprise a growing student population whose educational and related needs require unconventional institutional responses.

New trends are subtly but incrementally affecting operations:

- The need for health services has declined because many working students receive employees' health benefits.
- As more young mothers decide to complete their education, colleges and universities receive increased demands for child care services.
- Expanded classes at night result in more requests for security services.
- A difference of a few minutes in the bell schedule affects the quality of late afternoon or early evening classes because many students who must scramble to classes directly after work may be slightly late, interrupting lectures or seminars.
- Counselors may have increasing conflicts with registrar office staff and others who resist making exceptions to standard procedures that were designed for traditional college students.

Can urban public colleges and universities calibrate changes in the composition and needs of their student population and adjust to anticipated demands upon their limited resources? This case study describes a process that was implemented to analyze and accommodate a diverse, changing student population at Hunter College, one of the nine senior (four-year) colleges in the City University of New York. Survey research and structured deliberation throughout the college community yielded consensus about options for administrative decisions. The documentation of the process used by Hunter College to prepare and carry out the study was conducted by the College Board as part of their Urban University Study.

RESEARCH AS CATALYST FOR ACTION

The Hunter survey and the activities related to it—extensive preparation, publicity, reviews, comments, meetings—acted as catalysts in getting the campus community to address long-standing institutional concerns. The study capitalized on the respect that academics generally accord to a systematic, thoroughgoing effort to gather and use research information to guide decision making.

The project's purpose was to increase the effectiveness of the college's academic program and ancillary services provided to students. The formal rationale for the study emphasized that the Hunter student population and structure had changed dramatically over two decades. Hunter became coeducational in 1964 and, especially since 1970, had become more ethnically varied. Course offerings had proliferated in response to more heterogeneous academic needs. The study was designed to determine whether class schedules and support services also reflected the students' needs. Because The Ford Foundation partially supported the costs of this survey, it became known on campus as the Ford Study.

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF HUNTER STUDENTS

The Ford Study built on many earlier, less comprehensive or systematic investigations of Hunter students. Always the question has been how best to interpret and act on the results of such studies in planning and implementing more responsive institutional programs and services.

Much analysis and debate at Hunter during the 1960s and 70s centered on the status of evening session students. A distinction between "day" and "evening" students originated in 1950 when the Board of Higher Education decided to permit city colleges to transform their expanding evening session into Schools of General Studies in response to a demand for adult nondegree education. These schools were granted separate budgets, permitting special courses, counseling, and registration. The dean of the Hunter College School of General Studies expanded evening courses, many of them taught by part-time instructors.

By the late 1960s, Hunter College students visibly split into two categories of roughly comparable size: day session students of traditional college age and older evening students. Unrest over the treatment of evening students touched on issues such as the availability of administrative and coun-

selling services, child care, quality and scheduling of building maintenance, cafeteria and bookstore services, and class scheduling.

The Ford Study of 1981-1983 embraced the full range of Hunter College students; it was not intended, designed, or presented as an investigation primarily of evening students and their needs. Nonetheless, one effect of the study was to reinforce the formal integration of evening session students into the total Hunter College community—a process that began in 1975.

In the early 1980s the challenge facing Hunter College was to gather sufficient information to support policies that would help the college resolve and move beyond nagging concerns about equity. The differences between “day” and “evening” students had blurred. The number of evening students seeking degrees had increased dramatically, the number of older and part-time day students had also increased, and nondegree students were designated as evening session students. If additional data confirmed the apparent trends, the task was to deploy student services and academic programs to all students, a significant number of whom chose to attend classes in the evening.

NEW BUILDINGS AND A NEW PRESIDENT

Two events stimulated the development of the Ford Study: the appointment of Donna E. Shalala to succeed Jacqueline

Wexler as president of Hunter in 1980, and scheduled construction of two major new buildings. These changes occasioned a special review of academic programs and support services. The construction of the new buildings (opened in January 1984) provided opportunities to attract students and offer better services, yet also had the potential to aggravate the diffusion of programs and services.

President Shalala moved quickly to involve the entire Hunter community in a fresh assessment of ongoing problems. The Ford Study addressed her belief, shared by many faculty and administrators, that Hunter College should take steps to attract and respond imaginatively to a future college population that will be increasingly adult, part-time, and nontraditional. The president stated her plans consistently to a range of audiences so that the values and themes of her administration would be widely and unequivocally understood. And she personally communicated the importance of the study project from its inception, taking care to identify it with her office.

The design and implementation of the study was based in the president's office in order to signal to the Hunter community that: (1) the study reflected top-level administrative concerns; (2) groups and individuals with serious unresolved questions or objections would receive a hearing; and (3) the completed study would not gather dust but would result in decisions affecting the entire community.

The next section of this report, written by the special assistant to whom President Shalala assigned the project, describes the methodology and findings of the survey.

A Survey of Hunter College Students

by Shirley L. Mow

In fall 1982, to assist in planning for the future, Hunter College conducted a large-scale study of the characteristics and needs of its student population. The study revealed a predominantly female and minority student body, older and busier than students 20 years ago. Today's students juggle school, work, and family responsibilities. Many are in their mid-twenties or older; some are single parents who are self-supporting. Only a third receive financial assistance from parents. More than half are minority: blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Nearly 60 percent work full-time or part-time at nearby hospitals and businesses. Although Hunter students work and go to school in Manhattan, many live in the other boroughs. More than a third have family incomes under \$10,000, and work, along with grants, loans, and scholarships, helps pay for their educational expenses.

Hunter students attend college for reasons as varied as their backgrounds: to obtain enriching experiences, to get career direction, to obtain or update skills, or to pick up courses needed for admission to graduate school or state certification. The main reasons they choose Hunter are for its programs, cost, reputation, and convenience of location.

Although the College's curriculum has evolved to reflect the needs and interests of these new constituencies, class scheduling and support services have not reflected the heterogeneity of today's students and their needs. Hunter was interested in looking at how it might better identify these needs in order to improve support services. The findings suggested a number of improvements in areas ranging from scheduling and security to recruiting practices and even cafeteria service. Many of the resulting improvements are listed in the conclusion.

BACKGROUND

Hunter College was established in 1870 to educate young women who wished to become teachers. Originally called Normal College, the institution took its present name in 1914 in honor of its founder and first president, Thomas Hunter. The College's first mission was to provide an education to women who could not afford one. At Hunter, daughters of Jewish, Italian, and Irish working-class immigrants could get a good college education for free.

Graduate studies were introduced in 1921. By the 1940s Hunter was the world's largest college for women, and its

admissions standards were highly competitive. After World War II undergraduate courses were opened to returning male veterans. In 1964 Hunter became fully coeducational. Today the College offers undergraduate and master's degree programs in liberal arts and in the professional areas of education, social work, nursing, and health sciences.

A new generation of students now attends Hunter College: working adults, young mothers, returning women. Blacks, Hispanics, and recent immigrants from the Caribbean, Asia, South Africa, and Central and South America are a significant part of Hunter's more than 17,000 students, who attend school full- and part-time, during the day, mid-day, and evening.

"Hunter is very much an urban university," says President Donna E. Shalala. "The mood of New York City should be reflected in the classrooms at Hunter. It's vibrant. It's dynamic. It looks like the world."

In January 1984, Hunter College completed a major expansion of facilities: in addition to its city square block of buildings, two seventeen story towers were erected to form a triangle of buildings connected by bridges across both 68th Street and Lexington Avenue. The prospect of additional space and new facilities sparked excitement and inspired a special review of Hunter's academic programs and support services.

In 1981, in anticipation of the new buildings, Hunter College applied for and received a grant from the Ford Foundation to conduct a comprehensive study of its students. Hunter's new president, Donna E. Shalala, had made an early commitment to make the College more sensitive, caring, and responsive to the increasing number of nontraditional students. Before strategies to improve support services could be carried out, however, reliable data needed to be collected.

METHODOLOGY

The Ford Study had three major research objectives: (1) to provide a statistical description of the Hunter College student population, (2) to determine the patterns of class enrollment and scheduling preferences of students, and (3) to assess the quality of life at Hunter—both in terms of the College's support services and its physical and social environment.

Two different methodologies were employed to accomplish these research objectives. To profile the student population and describe patterns of class attendance, a large-scale survey of the student population was undertaken using a standardized questionnaire. As a data-gathering technique, the survey is well-suited to the purpose of obtaining quantifiable data on a large number of cases. Assuming the respondents have been randomly selected, the survey can yield findings that can be generalized to the population from which the sample was selected.

To elicit qualitative information about life at Hunter, a second methodology was adopted. This methodology consisted of conducting a series of focus group sessions. The purpose of focus group sessions is to discuss topics in an in-depth fashion within a small group context. These sessions are led by a group facilitator whose role is to provide direction to the discussion without inhibiting spontaneity.

IMPLEMENTATION

The first phase of the Ford Study—the large-scale survey—was undertaken at the end of the fall semester of 1981. In that semester there were 14,448 full- and part-time undergraduate students enrolled in day and evening classes at Hunter. From among them, a probability sample was selected which included 1,012 respondents. The primary sampling unit consisted of classes which were stratified along three interrelated dimensions: (1) starting time of classes (morning, afternoon, and evening); (2) level of classes (remedial, 100–299, 300 and over); and (3) size of class enrollment (6–40, 41–99, 100 and over).

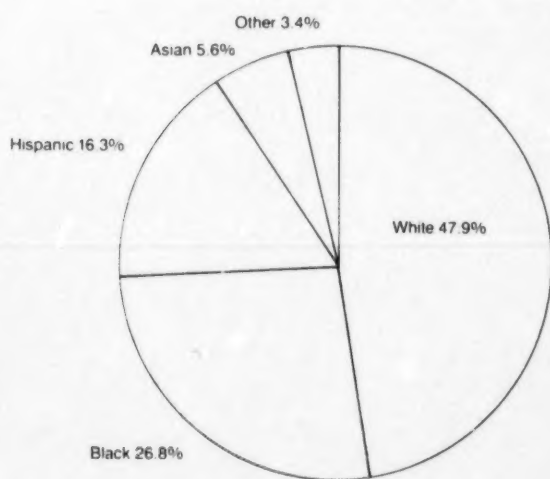


Figure 1. Ethnicity.

Two pilot surveys were conducted to test the methodological soundness of the questionnaire. The final survey was administered to students in 57 classes during the week of January 4–8, 1982.

THE HUNTER STUDENT

As was expected, the findings of the survey indicated that the majority (74 percent) of Hunter's students are women. Female students are more likely than male students, however, to be part-timers. Among the day students 12 percent of the female students and 9 percent of the male students attend classes part-time. Among evening students 75 percent of the female students and 40 percent of the male students attend classes part-time.

Ethnicity

The findings of the study, coupled with data from previous student studies, indicated that while the Hunter College student population remains predominantly female, it has changed dramatically in many other ways over the past two decades.

As shown in Figure 1, half of Hunter's students are minority: 27 percent are black, 16 percent are Hispanic, and 6 percent are Asian. One-third of the students were born outside the United States: 14 percent in the Caribbean, 5 percent in Asia, 3 percent in Latin America, and 13 percent in such countries as the Soviet Union, India, Pakistan, and South Africa (Figure 2). Among the foreign-born students, most have lived in the United States for more than five

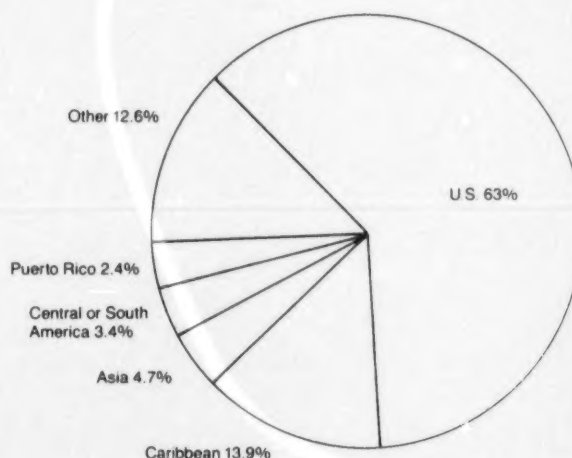


Figure 2. Place of birth.

Table 1. Payment of Educational Expenses* (in percent)

	<i>Personal Income</i>	<i>Parental Assistance</i>	<i>Employee Tuition Reimbursement</i>	<i>Loans</i>	<i>Scholarships</i>	<i>Grants</i>
Day	49.4	34.2	1.7	15.4	8.6	56.3
Evening	82.4	10.4	10.5	11.8	2.4	25.9
Column Total	54.8	30.5	3.2	14.7	7.5	51.2

*Row percentages exceed 100 percent because the question in the survey calls for multiple responses.

years. The racial and ethnic changes in Hunter's student body parallel the changes in the composition of New York City residents.

Other recent Hunter studies also found that almost one-half of the freshmen speak a foreign language at home.

Income

Forty percent of the day students and 28 percent of the evening students come from families whose income is less than \$10,000.

As indicated in Table 1, day students pay for their educational expenses primarily through grants (56.3 percent), personal income (49.4 percent), and parental assistance (34.2 percent). Most evening students pay for educational expenses through personal income (82.4 percent). These findings prompted the administration to look at the employment status of students with differing financial assistance needs. If a significant number of students who pay tuition from personal income are employed, perhaps they would be eligible for tuition reimbursement from their employers.

Employment

Of the Hunter students who work, over 77 percent work in Manhattan, although only 36 percent of the entire student body live there. This possibly indicates that physical proximity to work is a critical factor in the choice of college for students who are employed. Among the students who work, 55 percent of the evening students indicated that they travel a half-hour or more from work to class. These data suggested to the Hunter administration that the 5:35 p.m. beginning time for evening classes needed to be reviewed.

Eighteen percent of the students indicated that they work full-time; 41 percent work part-time. As to be expected, many more evening students (55.6 percent) than day students (9.6 percent) work full-time. Among the day students who work, 34 percent are employed in the service area and 30 percent in clerical positions. While similar percentages of evening students are employed in service posi-

tions (26.5 percent) and clerical jobs (30 percent), 23.5 percent hold managerial jobs. Interestingly, there is a perceptible increase in the number of day students who are employed full-time as they earn a greater number of credits. Among day freshmen, only 7.9 percent are employed full-time, but among day seniors, 17 percent are employed full-time. The same general relationship between class and employment status among day students holds for evening students.

For evening students as they earn more credits, there is a dramatic increase in the percentage employed full-time. Only 36 percent of evening students with less than 28 credits work full-time whereas 76 percent of evening students with 94 or more credits earned work full-time.

There are also sizable differences in work status among students according to their majors. Students in the social sciences are overrepresented among those working either full- or part-time. Students in mathematics and the sciences tend to be underrepresented among full-time workers and, along with those majoring in nursing, are also underrepresented among those working part-time.

Programs, cost, and reputation are the primary reasons day students choose Hunter. Evening students choose Hunter mainly because of cost and location. This led the administration to consider a recruitment effort targeted at potential evening students from nearby businesses. Along with this effort, students who are employed would be encouraged to ask their employers about tuition reimbursement benefits. (Only 10 percent of the self-identified evening students indicated that they received such reimbursement.)

PATTERNS OF CLASS ENROLLMENT

Overall Patterns

Student enrollment patterns are reflective of courses offered each semester. Given this constraint, our study attempted to determine what *other* factors played a part in students' choice of classes.

Total Sample

The frequency of class enrollment for all students in the sample varies considerably by both hour and day. In terms of hours, the frequency of class enrollment can be described as a positively skewed distribution. During the morning hours, class enrollment rises steadily until it reaches a peak between 11:00–12:00 noon. Afternoon enrollment tapers off gradually. In terms of days, the percentage of students in the total sample who take classes on Friday after 2:00 p.m. is low compared to the other days of the week.

Day Students

Because the majority of students in the sample are self-identified day students, the general pattern of class enrollment for day students adheres closely to that for the entire sample. Two additional points, however, should be made about the enrollment patterns of day students. First, a significant number of these students take courses offered in the evening hours. For example, from Monday through Thursday, an average of 12.8 percent of self-identified day students enroll in classes between 5:00–6:00 p.m. and an average of 10.1 percent enroll in classes between 6:00–7:00 p.m. Second, there is a perceptible drop in enrollment among day students on Wednesday from 1:00–2:00 p.m. and 2:00–3:00 p.m. This block of time coincides with the hour preceding and the first hour of Dean's Hours, a weekly time period reserved for club activities. Few classes are scheduled during this period on Wednesday, yet during this same time span on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, class enrollment is high.

Evening Students

As expected, the frequency distribution of class enrollment of evening students is opposite from that of day students. It can be described as a negatively skewed distribution.

Several additional features of this distribution should also be noted. First, as is the case with self-identified day students, a number of self-identified evening students take courses at hours not usually part of their scheduling routine. For example, from Monday through Thursday, an average of 13.2 percent of evening students take courses between 3:00–4:00 p.m. The corresponding figure for the 4:00–5:00 p.m. hour is 17.9 percent. Second, enrollments among evening students during the 9:00–10:00 p.m. hours are sparse; on the average, only 6.9 percent take courses at this time from Monday through Thursday. (Few evening classes are held on Friday.)

This discrepancy between "day/evening" self-identification and actual hours of class enrollment focused attention on the need to reexamine the definition assigned to "day/evening" students.

In this context, the Senate Master Plan Committee has suggested alternative ways of classifying the student popula-

tion. The Committee's classification scheme would designate three groups: the degree-seeking student, the nondegree student, and the second-degree student. Another classification system might be based on part-time/full-time student status. (It should be pointed out here that full-time/part-time student status does not necessarily coincide with day/evening student status. One finding in the Ford Study was that over one-third of the evening students attend classes full-time.)

Students Classified According to Number of Credits Earned

As students earn a greater number of cumulative credits, their class enrollment undergoes a relative decline in the morning hours. Correspondingly, there is a relative increase in their class enrollment during the afternoon and evening. These findings are consistent with data showing a marked increase in the percentage of students who are employed as they earn progressively more credits.

Students Classified According to Their Academic Division

The pattern of class attendance for students in the Social Science Division differs from the patterns for students in the other divisions and for students who have not yet declared a major. Generally speaking, the class enrollment of social science students is relatively higher in the evening. More likely this reflects the fact that a greater proportion of social science students are working.

Students Classified According to Their Employment Status

For both day and evening students, the patterns of class enrollment for students employed part-time correspond more closely to the patterns of attendance for nonemployed students than for full-time employed students. Among the day students who work part-time or not at all, the frequency of class enrollment is positively skewed with attendance tapering off considerably after 4:00 p.m. Among day students who are employed on a full-time basis, the frequency of class attendance is bimodally distributed with the highest peak occurring in the morning hours. This suggests that the majority of these students work in the afternoon or evening but that some also work during the morning and/or afternoon.

For evening students who work part-time or are not employed, enrollment is markedly higher during the morning and afternoon hours than it is for their full-time employed counterparts. After 5:00 p.m., their enrollment levels are the same as those of their full-time working counterparts. For evening students who work full-time, enrollment is very low throughout the morning and afternoon but increases precipitously after 5:00 p.m.

Total Number of Days Students Schedule Themselves for Classes

Almost half (48.6 percent) of the students surveyed attend classes five days per week. As expected, the percentage of day students who maintain a five-day per week schedule is appreciably greater than the percentage of evening students who do so (56 percent versus 11.6 percent). But the notion that evening students primarily adhere to a two-day per week schedule needs to be reexamined. One of the major findings to emerge in this study is that a sizable percentage of evening students take classes three days per week (23.2 percent) and an even larger percentage attend classes four days per week (29.0 percent). Furthermore, among evening students who take classes three days per week, fully 58.8 percent are employed full-time; among those who take classes four days per week, 45.5 percent are employed full-time.

It should also be pointed out that a steady decline in the percentage of all students who attend five days per week sets in as they earn more credits.

These findings suggest the need for a thorough reexamination of the scheduling of classes particularly in the evening. It is reasonable to conclude that students will take classes as frequently as needed in order to complete their degree in a reasonable period of time.

Motivational Basis for Current Scheduling of Classes by Students

The constraints under which students schedule their courses are clearly different for day and evening students and for students with different amounts of credits earned. Evening students appear to have less latitude in scheduling courses than day students. Similarly, students with a greater number of earned credits have less scheduling flexibility than students with a smaller number of earned credits. The reason expressed by students with 94 or more credits is that they have "no choice," which might reflect the reduced number of course offerings for those in the final semesters of their majors. Family responsibilities do not appear to be a major determinant.

This led the administration, in a push for additional scheduling hours during the evening, to recommend the scheduling of inultisection courses during evening Dean's Hours. Dean's Hours, traditionally reserved for student activities, occupy an attractive time slot in the evenings. Furthermore, because 20 percent of the evening students indicated a preference for Saturday classes in the survey, the administration has considered scheduling more courses on the weekend.

FOCUS GROUPS

To gather qualitative information about life at Hunter College, focus group sessions were conducted following the

move to new buildings in the spring semester of 1984. Altogether, ten different sessions were conducted with an average size of ten individuals per group. Selection of individuals for each group was based on membership in certain status categories. These categories included the following: (1) beginning evening students, (2) advanced evening students, (3) beginning day students, (4) graduating day students, (5) transfer day students, (6) high-range academic students, (7) middle-range academic students, (8) low-range academic students, (9) students who participate in extracurricular activities, and (10) returning women students. To increase the representativeness of the sample, students in each category were selected randomly from a list of all students in that category.

Students were paid a small stipend for their time. All students were guaranteed anonymity prior to participation in the groups. Each group was taped with the permission and understanding of the participants.

INSTITUTIONAL SERVICES

On the basis of the survey data, we discovered that students are generally uninformed about the availability of support services. Day students uniformly know more about services than evening students. Yet among day students, 40 percent or more did not know enough to rate 8 out of 31 services. Among evening students, 40 percent or more did not know enough to rate 18 out of the 31 services. As to be expected, students with a greater number of credits earned tend to know more about support services.

This finding was further substantiated during the focus group interviews. Day and evening students reported both confusion and often ignorance about student support services, as suggested in the following statement from a transfer student. "I didn't know Hunter had a counseling component, I didn't know it had a career counseling office.... I think these things can help a student.... It should be advertised better, perhaps on a College radio program."

To remedy this situation, three information centers were established. These centers serve as repositories of information about all support services and provide a locale for the pick-up and drop-off of routine forms. They are open at hours convenient to both day and evening students and are staffed by personnel qualified to answer standard inquiries. In addition, an information "hot line" is contemplated to furnish information to students during hours when the centers are not open.

A second step to increase awareness of services was to cluster the support-service offices in the new buildings. In the past, these offices were physically dispersed and often located in "low profile" areas in the College. A third step was to print maps and directories of all buildings.

Finally, the hours of department offices and College-wide services (for example, eateries, libraries, lounges,

audiovisual, duplication, mailroom, housekeeping, and security) were extended to accommodate evening and weekend students.

Among students who stated preferences for services not provided at Hunter, 23 percent of the day students and 15 percent of the evening students requested child care services. A Child Care Center was subsequently established in fall 1983 in the office space previously occupied by the President after she moved to new quarters. The Center accommodates 45 children and is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday and to 5:00 p.m. on Fridays.

During the course of conducting focus group sessions, several institutional service areas emerged as critical concerns: counseling, registration, and security.

Counseling

Many students were dissatisfied with the quality of student support services for academic advising and career counseling. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles, "The American College Student, 1982." In the UCLA study, about two-thirds of the 1,600 respondents "complained about the quality of the institutional services, such as academic advising, career counseling and job placement, that were related to their programs and careers. In general, upper classes were more dissatisfied with the services than were lower-division students."

Counseling at Hunter was seen to be particularly lacking in supplying information about course and degree requirements. Evening students reported the greatest problem; transfer and advanced students cited great difficulty. Beginning in the fall of 1984, the Office of Student Services implemented several initiatives, such as a buddy system between freshmen and upperclassmen, aimed at orienting new students to Hunter.

Registration

Compounding a lack of reliable counseling information and performance is the general dissatisfaction with the registration process. "Registration at Hunter College is an insane asylum. I will never... pass registration. Maybe my courses, but never registration." While students did report some improvement with the new on-line system, registration was characterized as confusing. Students were especially concerned about enrolling in required courses, which are often closed before they can register for them. The inability of some students to register for closed "required courses" serves to confound schedules and delay graduation.

In addition, many transfer students reported wanting standardized requirements throughout the City University of New York system. For them, such standardization would

ease registration as well as eliminate extensive delays in receiving transfer credits.

Security

Throughout the focus group interviews, personal safety and security were stressed as important issues to students attending an urban university. Women students in particular wanted added security staff at Hunter after 8:00 p.m. and suggested that a "sign in" or identification card system be instituted to minimize trespassers. Students believed the operation of the new buildings at Hunter during evening hours actually increased security risks because additional isolated areas were created. Consequently, the administration established a "contact visit" security program for persons on campus during off-hours when facilities are sparsely populated.

THE COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

Social Life

In attempting to understand the social environment of Hunter College, some reference must be made to the different needs of part-time students (both day and evening) and full-time students. For example, the part-time student at Hunter typically is involved in full-time employment; many are seeking bachelor's degrees for promotion, advancement, or career change. Compared to full-time students, part-time students are not pressured by career choices or career entry problems. Their problem has to do with time and the need to balance work, family, and school responsibilities. Evening students in general reported little involvement in extracurricular activities. Even so, many of them wished to see the scheduling of such activities in the evening and on weekends as a way of increasing their participation.

Among returning women students, the Women's Center was seen as providing an important social dimension in easing their transition into the student role. They reported that the Center made it possible for them to meet new students and develop social ties, ties that carried through their attendance at Hunter. But across student groups there was little evidence that Hunter provided the sort of social environment provided at residential campuses. "Hunter provides a great number of things for most students... but many students cannot or will not take advantage of such activities. Most people come here, get their lectures and leave... there just isn't much time to socialize" (evening student).

But although students in general viewed themselves as commuters pressed for time, many reported making friends or having friends upon arrival at Hunter. Having friends at Hunter seems linked to how students discover Hunter. Many students reported coming to Hunter on recommendations of friends and family members. Such recommendations

assured friendships upon arrival, and such friendships helped in the adjustment to College life. "My friends help me with registration. I find out what I need and they tell me what to do" (entering freshman).

Facilities

Overall, students reported feeling a great deal of excitement about the facilities in the new buildings. The buildings were seen as a distinct improvement, one that could help improve both library and cafeteria services. Students reported enjoying the "additional space," the improved classroom facilities, and particularly the new library. The library expanded from two floors in the old building to nine stories in the new towers. Students unanimously viewed this modernization and expansion as a major addition to the Hunter College academic experience.

Academic Experience

The vast majority of Hunter College students are satisfied with the quality of their academic instruction and the relationships they have with their professors in and out of the classroom. The faculty was continually rated as of a high caliber by each respondent group.

Students viewed Hunter faculty with great satisfaction, the majority of students reporting their professors were "interested," "accessible," and "informed." Moreover, the Hunter faculty was seen as providing an academic setting that was challenging and competitive, without being overwhelming. However, student groups varied in reporting the faculty helpful and accessible. Surprisingly, day students reported less satisfaction than evening students with their opportunities to communicate with faculty members about their studies. Students often credited faculty with developing career insights and options, and with providing guidance to students in selecting courses.

Not surprisingly, students reported a very strong preference for faculty who were accessible and who appreciated student pressures that extended outside the college. Among all students, returning women were most appreciative of the special concern faculty exhibited toward them. Students across groups wished to explore the idea of relaxing existing language requirements because many students speak another language at home. Freshman students reported that entry-level courses at Hunter were quite demanding, and they wished to see more accessible and sympathetic faculty instruct entry-level courses. Students found science classes to be the most difficult in which to learn. Class size and instructors' language difficulties were two reasons given for such feelings. (Many of the science courses are taught by foreign graduate assistants. Such instructors seem to compound student learning difficulties.)

The overall perception of students is that they receive a "relevant," "contemporary," and "exceptional" educa-

tion. Hunter College was seen as providing rich and rewarding courses in a wide variety of areas. The courses were reported as exposing students to new experiences, but the students were fairly split between viewing the purpose of college as a broadening liberal arts experience and seeing it as career preparation.

REFORMS BASED ON FINDINGS

Hunter's experience has demonstrated that providing services for a student population of highly varied backgrounds and life situations poses a difficult challenge to educators. But fresh, accurate, and meaningful data collected from a collegewide study enables an institution to plan its services better and to distribute resources accordingly. For example, based on the findings of our study, the college initiated a series of reforms:

- Extended hours of the Registrar, Bursar, Admissions, and Evening Advising offices until 7:00 p.m.
- Allowed multisection courses to be scheduled during Dean's Hours.
- Began evening classes at 5:40 p.m. to allow time for travel from work to school.
- Established "quick bite" food services with eateries open until the beginning of the last evening class.
- Established a well-publicized security program and a "contact visit" system for persons on campus during off-hours.
- Established Information Centers where commonly used forms and duplicating machines are available.
- Prepared weekly updates of events and activities for the Information Centers and distributed them to all personnel including security.
- Established a Child Care Center to accommodate both day and evening students.
- Extended hours of the Women's Center to include evenings.

Other reforms to be initiated are:

- Reallocate resources for a fair distribution of sections of courses and support services between day and evening students.
- Rotate required and elective courses offered for majors in the evening over a three- or four-year period so that students can complete their degree in a reasonable time period.
- Schedule required and major courses in the evening with least possible conflict.

- Implement recruitment strategies aimed at potential evening students who work near the College.
- Maintain large bulletin boards listing advising hours, office hours, and clear maps of the campus buildings and floors.

- Work to increase scholarships for day and evening part-time students.
- Provide computer programs with information on career placement, financial aid questions, and library use.

Conclusions

The *process* is often as important as the *findings* of policy research. The Hunter College experience in the early 1980s is a good case example.

PROCESS = RESULTS

From the outset everyone had a say. Social science faculty were involved in drafting the questionnaire, and a highly regarded statistician in the mathematics department helped design the probability sample. The technical aspects of methodology and conduct of the study itself were reviewed repeatedly at various committee and College Senate meetings. Administration of the questionnaire was personally supervised by the president's assistant in individual classes. This procedure reinforced the understanding that the study was a presidential priority and ensured that students had an opportunity to complete it properly.

Following the data collection and analysis, preliminary findings were extensively reviewed and discussed with major groups in the college's governance structure: Deans, the Senate Master Plan Committee, the Evening Session Council, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Delegate Assembly, and the Faculty Personnel and Budget Committee. All responded individually or as a committee with recommendations; the president of the Evening Session Student Government also offered recommendations.

The Senate Master Plan Committee and the Evening Session Council voiced reservations about making definitive inferences based on the data, and both urged that follow-up research be conducted. But the Master Plan Committee wrote that although the results can at best be considered a set of "crude indicators, . . . we are on the right track when we conclude that the college is a 14-hour/day institution and that there is a serious evening session student population." Moreover, the committee agreed that this nontraditional population is likely to increase and "requires nontraditional responses from administration and faculty."

All responses from individuals and committees included recommendations that administrative and related support services should be available and advertised to evening students. Seemingly simple but critical matters that had been shelved for years were finally addressed, such as starting the evening session five minutes later so that students coming directly from work would not be late to the first class—a detail that makes an enormous difference to any instructor in the first evening time slot.

Other scheduling, service, and curricular changes are summarized in the preceding section. Attention also focused on the appointment of an administrator in charge of the evening session, someone who could coordinate programs and services and have sufficient authority to make on-the-spot decisions. An assistant dean has since been appointed in response to this concern.

Overall, the process of carrying out the Hunter student survey reinforced collegewide acceptance of proposals aimed at improving the quality and allocation of academic and support services. Instead of making decisions based on assumptions and collective intuition from personal and professional experience, the college community agreed to defer decisions until the facts had been gathered. Who attends Hunter? Why? What do they need? The key decision makers in the Hunter College Senate and the administration could then determine the best course of action on the basis of facts, resources, and options. What the process loses in time and efficiency it gains in a climate of trust in and acceptance of decisions to be implemented.

DECISION MAKING IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

The Hunter College study raised and focused a long-standing agenda of many institutional concerns, and became a reference point, enabling the institution to adjust to new trends and needs.

For Hunter and other institutions in New York City, conventional assumptions about the characteristics, motives, and backgrounds of college students have not been reliable guides for program planning or evaluation since 1847, when the City College of New York (CCNY) was founded. In 1961, Hunter and City College along with other public higher education institutions were brought together under the City University of New York (CUNY) system. A time-honored mission of the City University has been to provide tuition-free higher education for the urban poor. For a century the students were mostly Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants who graduated from local public schools and were able to meet rigorous standards of admission. In 1970 the Open Admissions program, Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) program, and College Discovery program increased the percentages of entering black and Hispanic students by over 30 percent. In fall of 1976, CUNY imposed tuition, and enrollment decreased through 1977, stabilizing in 1980.

The turbulent development of open admissions to CUNY in 1970 abruptly thrust public urban higher education out of its traditional though illusory position above the fray and into the arena of political and social policy. The national as well as the local academic community expressed concern about the purposes, structures, and standards of the City University. Critics focused on the threat that the integrity of all public institutions of higher education could be undermined by decisions that were essentially political rather than academic.

In her history of the City University of New York from 1945–1970, Sheila Gordon states that “higher education is a political phenomenon; and, especially in the public sector, it is linked inherently to its local political configuration.”¹ She offers this interpretation of decision making at CUNY:

The university, like any institution, is political. All its decisions, in turn, are political, including those which are considered “educational” or “academic.”

The only useful distinction to be made has to do with the range of participation involved in a particular decision. Typically, a decision reached by a small group of academicians who share the same set of values and interests is approved as “educational.”

Those decisions which engage a broad range of perspectives, on the other hand, are denigrated as “political.” Either type of decision, narrow or broad, may produce a beneficial result. The field of access to the decision must be as broad as the range of those who have, or who may have, stakes in the outcome of the issue.²

The process Hunter’s leadership used in conducting the Ford Study consistently reflected this viewpoint.

Hunter College’s provost stresses that, while the survey revealed some interesting information, most of its conclusions came as no surprise to faculty and administrators long immersed in the life of Hunter College. The study and the process served to confirm, enrich, and refine viewpoints, and perhaps more importantly for change, to correct misconceptions.

The study results illuminated decision making in much the same way as corporate market research. While some outcomes of market research may not startle experts in a field, no responsible executive would rely solely on intuitive knowledge, regardless of the extent and quality of personal experience related to the investigation. At the same time, intuitive knowledge is not ignored; if data strongly contradict personal experience, further investigation is required. The trick is to integrate research and personal knowledge and beliefs to achieve consensus and make appropriate decisions.

GUIDELINES FOR OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The Hunter College case study suggests five guidelines for administrators at other urban universities who may be considering similar investigations:

1. Build upon previous studies and committee reports. Issues and concerns that pervade a college community are rooted in long-standing institutional dilemmas, some of which may have been formally resolved in the past but which continue to exert influence on current affairs. Examination of previous studies, committee reports, and related documents—including students’ research projects conducted for courses—are valuable sources of data and historical background useful in refining fresh investigations and enriching interpretations of findings.
2. Make the investigation a priority of the chief executive. The president of the college/university must personally communicate the importance of the project and reinforce the message by assigning a person to administer the project who is visible and widely known to have direct and regular access to the chief administrative officer. This person should “bird dog” the study personally—that is, be an active participant in every phase, however technical, and oversee its implementation.
3. Do not prejudge the conclusions, no matter how obvious some of them may seem. The investigation should capitalize on the academic community’s commitment to objective research designed to determine facts.
4. Enlist experts for designing the survey and analyzing the data. The credentials and methods of those who conduct any research intended to guide policymaking must be unimpeachable.
5. Involve everyone in the process who has or might have a stake in the outcomes of the study. All concerned groups and individuals should have ample opportunities to respond to the findings. Preliminary as well as final results should be shared extensively, and written reactions and recommendations should be invited. All responses should be explicitly acknowledged as decisions are made.

Above all, study planners must keep in mind what it is they want to survey. A Hunter College sociology professor who participated in the Hunter study notes: “One of the major strengths of our study was that it provided a statistical profile of the student population. The students we surveyed had to be ‘representative,’ so we had to have a probability sample that allowed us to make inferences. The questionnaire we used should not be viewed as a standard instrument for any college that wants to survey its student body. Our instrument met the particular needs of Hunter College.”

Hunter’s experience does not provide a blueprint for other institutions, but it may offer encouragement and guidance for those institutions ready to fashion a survey and a process to meet their particular needs.

1. Gordon, Sheila, *The Transformation of the City University of New York, 1945–1970*. New York: Columbia University, 1975, p. 1.

2. Ibid.